

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 03751 301209Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 301102Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8587
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3751

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJ: PRESIDENT'S HEALTH

REF: DAMASCUS 3652

1. SPECULATION CONTINUES ABOUT THE STATE OF THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH WITH GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG DAMASCENES THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG. THE PRESIDENT, HOWEVER, CONTINUES TO RECEIVE VISITORS MEETING WITH THE ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR AND A CANADIAN DELEGATION ON JUNE 28 AND THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AND AN ENVOY FROM THE YEAMEN ON JUNE 29. MINECON IMADI TOLD CHARGE THAT HE HAD CALLED THE PRESIDENT'S PRIVATE SECRETARY DABOUL TO CHECK THE REPORTS HE WAS HEARING AND DABOUL EMPHATICALLY DENIED THAT ANYTHING WAS WRONG. IMADI SAID THAT HE HAD MET WITH THE PRESIDENT A LITTLE OVER A WEEK AGO AND ASSAD SEEMED FINE. IMADI NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT ASSAD HAD LOST
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CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT WHICH IS BORN OUT BY CURRENT NEWSPAPER
PICUTRES OF THE PRESIDENT.

2. OFFICIALS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ARE NOW DOING THEIR BEST TO STEM THE TIDE OF RUMORS WHICH HAVE TITILATED THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY. THE SERIES OF PUBLIC MEETINGS THE PRESIDENT IS NOW HOLDING, TWO PER DAY, ARE CLEARLY DESIGNED

TO STILL THE TREMORS AMONG THE CITIZENRY.
SCHEDULED PUBLIC APPEARANCE BY THE PRESIDENT
AT THE SHERATON HOTEL OPENING WITH HUNDREDS OF GUESTS JULY 1
SHOULD HELP.

3. WHATEVER THE STATE OF THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH, HE CANNOT
AFFORD TO HAVE PEOPLE BELIEVE HE IS IN ANY WAY INCAPACITATED.
ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ASSAD
IN THE ABSENCE OF A VICE PRESIDENT, AS IS THE CURRENT SITUATION
THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, HALABI, WOULD TAKE
OVER TEMPORARILY. NEVERTHELESS, FEW SYRIAN HAVE MUCH FAITH
IN THE PRIMACY OF THE CONSTITUTION (ACTUALLY MOST HAVE NO IDEA
WHAT THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRES), AND EXPECT THAT A DISPLAY OF
WEAKNESS BY THE PRESIDENT, PHYSICAL AOR POLITICAL, WOULD BE MET BY
CONSIDERABLE DEBILITATING INTERNAL STRIFE AS POTENTIAL CANDIDATES
FOR LEADERSHIP JOCKYED FOR POWER. THUS FAR, THERE IS NO
INDICATIONS OF CLEAR INTERNAL MANEUVERING FOR POWER. SOME
SEE THE CURRENT TRANSFERS OF KEY MILITARY OFFICERS
AS PART OF JUST SUCH A SCENARIO, BUT INsofar AS WE CAN
TELL, THE COMMAND CHANGES WERE PLANNED BEFORE THERE WAS
POSSIBLE EVIDENCE OF ANYTHING WRONG WITH THE PRESIDENT.
PELLETREAU

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